

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

In our responsive reading of our Psalm this morning, together we asked that God would “Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.” You realize of course that as we say this together, God will give us just what we are asking for. After all, God the creator of heaven and earth, who created us, knows what’s best for us, the way he intends that we should live. This not only for our benefit but for his glory.

So we realize that as we ask God for understanding that we may keep and observe his law with whole heart, we realize that we have the opportunity to follow God’s law. We realize that as we ask God to turn our eyes from vanities and to give us life in his way, in our lives as baptized and saved Lutheran Christians we are walking with Jesus on his path of life.

Oh, oh! We look at our gospel this morning, Jesus spelling out for us just what the law looks like in practice. It’s one thing to talk about following his ways, but it’s another thing to actually see just what he expects and to actually live that way. Because now we realize that this is actually how God wants us, “me,” to live. Well, maybe we realize we’re not walking with Jesus in quite the fashion we thought we were.

Jesus talks about what this all looks like in his kingdom. It’s not “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

Jesus continues: “But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

We hear this and often we think some variation of “yeah, but...” and honestly this reaction shows that we’ve got a ways to go before we are in Christ’s likeness. There’s simply no room for “what about...” and variations, when we listen closely to what Jesus says. Don’t resist, turn the other cheek, give your cloak, go the second mile, give to those who beg, and love your enemies. Jesus’ commands are direct and to the point. There’s no room for rationalizing or trying to justify not obeying.

I know some of us are coming up with all kinds of scenarios to get around these, to not obey the letter and intent of Jesus’ commands. But instead of looking for loopholes and exceptions, what if we simply figure out the best way to actually do them.

Yes, we are saved by grace through faith, justified by faith, but that's not the end in itself, it's the beginning of our lives in Christ. Saved by grace through faith we live in faith, trusting in the promises of God, trusting in the commands before us this morning. Jesus calls us and equips us, he gives us strength to do as he commands, grace to embrace his commands. You and I are called to share even with those we don't like, whom we may consider to be enemies, the forgiveness, love, and grace of God that we, you and I, have received from Christ, we are to pray for their wellbeing, for their salvation.

So what's this look like in our lives? How do we do this in actuality? Is there someone you haven't been praying for because you secretly, or openly, despise them? Are you sitting here asking yourself how you can love them the way Jesus wants you to love them?

But this is what we said we wanted in our responsive Psalm reading this morning.

Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.
Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.

You and I know what we must do, what lives lived in faith should look like. You and I, baptized believers, saved by grace through faith, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live our lives in faith, can do as Jesus commands. Not by our own strength, but by his strength, striving to live our lives so as to be pleasing to God, reflecting his perfection, his light shining in and through us. It's not "my way or the highway" instead it's "Jesus' way the only way."

Let go of anger, resentment, irritation, whatever, be filled with God's peace, God's grace, walking in his ways trusting him in all things.

AMEN